TL 4672

Comissão para os Direitos do Povo Maubere

A Paz é Possível em Timor Leste

The Honorable
Madeleine Albright
Secretary of State of the United States

3 March 1999

Dear Secretary Albright,

As NGOs that have accompanied the question of East Timor for over 15 years and campaigned for the rights of the East Timorese, we hereby appeal to the US Administration to exercise its influence on the Indonesian Government in order that it immediately halt its policy of arming civilians in the territory, and that it proceed to disarm them without delay, under international supervision.

We are convinced that, if the Indonesian authorities' current practice is allowed to continue, the situation in East Timor could become uncontrollable, thereby aggravating the suffering of the Timorese people, who have already endured an illegal occupation that caused the death of over one-third of the population, and creating additional obstacles to the already difficult democratization process in Indonesia itself.

In a territory in which there are approximately 20,000 troops – one soldier per 40 inhabitants (a 7 to 9 times higher ratio than in Indonesia) – it makes no sense whatsoever either to arm civilians or to make the disarming of Resistance forces a prerequisite to halting such irresponsible conduct.

The Timorese Resistance have shown clear determination to build a climate of reconciliation among all parties involved, by tirelessly appealing for peace and keeping in permanent contact with all tendencies concerned. Mr. Xanana Gusmão, President of the National Council of Timorese Resistance, has been intensely active in this regard, in spite of the restrictions to which he is still subjected.

We share the feeling generally held by the Portuguese public that the immediate presence of an international force is absolutely essential, and believe that a UN police force would be the most appropriate form for such a presence to take. Otherwise, not only will violence escalate in the territory, but it will become impossible to hold any kind of consultation among the Timorese people on their political future, in line with President Habibie's proposal and international law.

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In view of the particularly close and influential relationship your government has with the Indonesian authorities, we believe that you are in a privileged position to contribute towards peace in East Timor, at this crucial stage in the self-determination process. An opportunity to reach an internationally acceptable settlement to the conflict has finally arisen, and the chance must not be wasted. The situation requires prompt and decisive action.

In the hope that you will give this appeal your serious consideration, we remain,

Yours sincerely,

(Jean Pierre Catry)
A Paz é Possível em Timor Leste

(Cristina Cruz)
Comissão para os Direitos do Povo Maubere